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# SOVIET'S DEFENSES CALLED INFLEXIBLE

## U.S. General Says Plane Affair Is Evidence They Might Be Penetrated if Needed

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 17 — The Air Force's Chief of Staff says that evidence gathered from the Soviet downing of a South Korean passenger plane on Sept. 1 shows that Soviet air defenses are inflexible.

"In my mind," the officer, Gen. Charles A. Gabriel, said in an interview on Wednesday, "it confirms what we thought."

The general, who said he had been given "a pretty good rundown" of what happened in the two and a half hours the airliner was tracked over Kamchatka, the Sea of Okhotsk and Sakhalin, also questioned the competence of the Soviet pilots.

Moreover, a senior official of the Reagan Administration, who asked not to be identified, said today that it was "quite possible" that the Soviet pilot did not know he was shooting at a civilian passenger plane. This, the official said, made the Russians guilty of "criminal negligence."

### Americans More Confident

General Gabriel said the performance of Soviet air defenses "gives us a little more confidence" in the ability of the United States Air Force to overcome the defenses if necessary.

In the view of some specialists, skepticism over the effectiveness of Soviet air defenses and tactical airpower may affect Congressional consideration of President Reagan's military budget. Mr. Reagan said the airliner episode showed the United States needed more military power.

But critics in Congress have begun to put a different interpretation on the incident and to question the need for increased military budgets and especially the need for building both the B-1 bomber and the Stealth bomber, a jet that designed to evade radar detection.

General Gabriel said Soviet pilots were held on "a short leash," with commanders not trusting them to have radio frequencies with which they could have contacted the airliner.

### Soviet Issued Denial on Radio

Soviet authorities have insisted that the interceptor that shot down the airliner was equipped with a radio and an international emergency channel with which it tried, but failed, to contact the airliner.

The general said one pilot had fired his guns well behind the airliner and out of range before firing the missiles that shot it down.

He also said, "I don't think he had tracers." Soviet spokesman have said the fighter pilot fired tracers from a cannon to warn the South Korean pilot he was off course.

Earlier in the day, General Gabriel said in a speech before the Air Force Association, "This barbarism and the Soviet lies to cover up their crime have clearly proven to the world what the Soviet leadership stands for."

Speaking at the same forum, President Reagan's national security adviser, William P. Clark, scoffed at the paranoia often attributed to the Russians. Mr. Clark, a former judge, said, "We should not let the insanity plea exonerate them."

### Less Formidable Than Believed

On the question of Soviet air defenses, military analysts inside and outside the Government, having sifted through the evidence, said it revealed the air defenses to be less formidable than previously believed. They suggested Soviet actions had been a consequence of military confusion and rigidity rather than careful calculation.

In the Soviet Union, the Air Defense Forces are a service arm separate from the Air Force, Army, Navy and Strategic Missile Forces. With 600,000 troops, it is divided into three branches — electronic detection, with 6,000 radars; aviation, with 3,000 interceptors, and missiles, with 12,000 surface-to-air missiles.

According to some specialists, the need for the regional command in Far Eastern Siberia to communicate with Moscow accounted for the two and a half hours that the airliner was tracked before being shot down. Soviet spokesmen have said the decision to shoot down the plane was made by local commanders.

### Border Regulations Tightened

Under a recent law on Soviet national frontiers, the Air Defense Forces are understood to have received new regulations on guarding the boundaries. Specialists said the tightened controls undoubtedly governed Soviet actions against the South Korean plane.

The specialists said radar was critical to Soviet air defense since all operations were controlled from the ground.

"A Soviet pilot," said one specialist, "is little more than a guided missile."

An Air Force officer said Soviet radar equipment, whether on the ground or in planes, lagged behind that of the United States and was not able to distinguish between the United States Air Force's RC-135 reconnaissance plane and the Korean Air Lines 747 in the same area, despite their differences in size and shape.

Most Soviet radar operators are officers who have been given four years of training and hold the equivalent of engineering degrees. Even so, an inexperienced operator could well have been confused by the appearance of two blips on his scope.

Intelligence operations in the Soviet Union are highly compartmentalized, so that information from one unit is handed to another only slowly. Specialists speculated that information on air control radio transmissions from the South Korean plane, monitored by Soviet intelligence, was not made available to air defense radar operators.